

Congress of the United States
Washington, DC 20515

March 20, 2020

Dear Acting Secretary Wolf,

We write to express our serious concerns with ongoing immigration enforcement activities during the COVID-19 pandemic. There are a number of areas where continuing status quo policies will contribute to the spread of the virus, and it is urgent that measures be put in place to protect the health and safety of all Americans.

Detention facilities

Immigration detention facilities, even before the start of the COVID-19 pandemic, have been breeding grounds for illness. For detainees who are immunocompromised or otherwise susceptible to the worst consequences of contracting COVID-19, holding them in detention may be literally a matter of life and death. With the news that an ICE employee at the detention center in Elizabeth, NJ has been tested for coronavirus, it has become paramount that your plans are made clear and public.

- 1) What is your plan to prevent an outbreak in any facility that holds DHS/ICE detainees, including temporary CBP holding and processing facilities?
- 2) In the event of a positive test by an ICE or CBP employee or detainee, what is your plan to manage the outbreak?
- 3) Will you commit to releasing certain detainees, including those who are at particular risk for death if they contract COVID-19, and using available alternatives to detention for them?
- 4) How will you ensure that any detainees who are released or placed in community-based alternatives to detention are able to properly isolate to avoid contact with COVID-19?

Interior Enforcement

Another imminent risk is that undocumented people will decline to seek medical attention for fear of deportation. It is abundantly clear how dangerous this dynamic is for everyone in our communities - our ability to track the spread of COVID-19 and contain it depends on access to testing and treatment for those affected. Freezing millions of people out of the process based on their immigration status puts all of us at risk.

- 5) Will you make public statements that nobody will be subject to immigration enforcement for seeking medical attention during the COVID-19 pandemic?
- 6) Will you commit to suspending interior enforcement during the COVID-19 pandemic?
- 7) Will you commit to freezing enforcement on visa overstays for those individuals who are unable to return home because of the COVID-19 pandemic?

Deportations

While the quarantining of badly affected areas is good practice for helping contain the spread of COVID-19, the virus does not respect borders or differences in nationalities. As we have seen the spread cross transcontinentally in a matter of weeks, it has left no doubt that the failure to contain the virus anywhere in the world puts people elsewhere in the world at risk. Deporting people who may have been exposed to coronavirus to either countries that have few or no cases or to countries with weak health care infrastructure is an unacceptable risk to take. Many countries, including the United States, are implementing strict border controls during this pandemic, and we should make no exception for ICE Air and deportations.

- 8) Will you commit to freezing deportations during the COVID-19 pandemic?
- 9) To what extent are you coordinating with foreign governments to ensure that we are respecting their border control policies that have put in place as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic?

Immigration court and naturalization ceremonies

Throughout the country, judicial processes are being frozen in response to CDC and medical professional guidance.

- 10) Will you commit to freezing in-person immigration court proceedings and naturalization ceremonies during the COVID-19 pandemic?
- 11) Will you commit to proceeding with video conference proceedings where possible and necessary?

Given the urgency of this situation, we ask for a response by the end of this week, no later than Friday, March 20th, 2020. In this crisis, we must all pull together to provide services for and protect the health of every one of our constituents. We look forward to working together to ensure that everyone gets the care they need.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Ilhan Omar', with a long horizontal line extending to the right.

Ilhan Omar
Member of Congress

Additional signers:

Rep. Rashida Tlaib
Rep. Debbie Dingell
Rep. Joseph P. Kennedy III
Rep. Barbara Lee
Rep. David E. Price
Rep. Raúl M. Grijalva
Rep. Scott Peters
Rep. Henry C. "Hank" Johnson, Jr.
Rep. Mark Takano
Rep. Mark Pocan
Rep. Judy Chu
Rep. Tony Cárdenas
Rep. Jan Schakowsky
Rep. Eleanor Holmes Norton